

## "The world culture entered Turkey": new conflict lines and the challenges for democratic consolidation in Turkey

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# "The World Culture Entered Turkey"

New Conflict Lines and the Challenges for  
Democratic Consolidation in Turkey

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## Summary

Turkish society is politically divided to an extent that made even German Chancellor Angela Merkel mention the necessity of overcoming internal divisions when she congratulated Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on winning the election on 2 November 2015. Divergences within Turkish society involving different views concerning the best path of development have a tradition that reaches back into Ottoman times. When the republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 the modernization project of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his followers set the goals for the country's development in the decades to follow. The sweeping Kemalist reforms met with resistance from different sections of Turkish society from an early stage because they excluded the existing plurality conceptually, especially religion as a legitimate source for public moral order: Ethnic minorities such as the Kurds, whose striving for their own sovereign state had been ignored in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, were not willing to subscribe to the nationalist construction of the Turkish citizenry. The radical version of secularism that state founder Mustafa Kemal pushed through also brought about dissent across the country. These lines of opposition have continued to exist, and the Turkish sociologist Şerif Mardin thus described Turkish society as having been divided into two parts since the Ottoman Empire, namely "the center" and "the periphery" (1973) – a separation which continued in the Turkish Republic with the center represented by the urban, elitist, modernist forces, which followed and embraced Atatürk's Westernization reforms, and the periphery made up of rural, conservative and religiously-oriented people who saw themselves devalued by Kemalism because of their ethnic or religious identification.

In view of the long-standing divisions between political Islam, the Kurdish minority and the Kemalist nation-state establishment, it might be thought that the present polarization between the ruling AKP government and their political opposition would run along the same lines, with power positions reversed: The ruling AKP, which has been in office since 2002 as a result of a series of landslide election victories, emphasizes values which were conceptually excluded from the project of modern Turkey but which continued to influence the lives of large sections of society. Indeed, the party's overwhelming success is at least partially accounted for by the fact that the AKP has embraced the periphery. After 13 years in office, the party has just won another parliamentary election (in November 2015) and once again holds an absolute majority of seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Nevertheless, the traditional divide separating an urban elite of secular republicans from a rural population with more conservative moral values which supports nationalists and parties with religious backgrounds no longer applies. The landscape of political identities has changed fundamentally in Turkey.

- This report recapitulates the political developments that Turkey has gone through since the AKP first took office in 2002, in order to highlight the dynamic relationship between democratizing reforms and their pluralizing consequences on the one hand, and the simultaneous polarization of political identities on the other. The AKP rule does account for a number of leaps forward in Turkey's democratization process – albeit possibly partially unintended or possibly for purely instrumental reasons – and

these continue to fuel domestic political rivalry. A new civic consciousness has emerged in the public, surfacing most impressively during the so-called Gezi Park protest wave in 2013–2014. The government's reactions to these new forms of exercising democratic citizenship in Turkey were repressive and uncompromising. For one thing, the AKP enjoys such strong backing by a clear majority in the Turkish electorate that the party leaders do not seem to feel any need to seek compromise with political minorities. In addition, and despite the party's tremendous success in elections, the AKP has repeatedly been feared losing control. When factions from the traditional elite of civil servants in the judiciary, from the military guardians of Kemalist ideology and a purpose-built platform of secularist circles that raised their voices as the "concerned civil society" of the nation continued to challenge the power of the AKP government, these experiences contributed to the AKP's increased tendency to choose authoritarian interventions in domestic decision making. Although confrontations in recent years have thus *inter alia* shown where the last bastions of traditional Kemalism are located, the lines of the polarization today no longer follow the previous pattern. Rather, fundamentally conflicting conceptualizations of democracy are upheld by the political opposition in Turkey today.

- Critical political issues that were tackled by the AKP in the early years such as the peace process initiated with the Kurds and the debate on a new constitution with broadened civil rights – all of which were noted with satisfaction by many observers of the country's democratization process in and outside Turkey – still await successful settlement. Party political controversies, the unexpected emergence of a new opposition in the shape of the liberal and pro-Kurdish political party of the HDP, and the EU accession negotiations which have been stagnating until recently all prompted AKP leaders to exhibit a high-handed attitude. Their change in direction from the initial reform promises deepened existing suspicion among secular circles of Turkish society, and shaped new political identities. Being either for or against the AKP has become a central point for political identification over the past decade, and it has created a tense and mutually hostile atmosphere in Turkish society.
- Although much of the backsliding into a state of illiberalism can be attributed to the performance of the AKP and the party's leading figures, central deficiencies in the country's political culture have played a role as well. Despite the many decades of electoral democracy and a strong tradition of constitutionalism, no political culture valuing pluralism and the individual's fundamental rights has ever come into existence; and at present the AKP is also showing no interest in fostering it. However, while the prospects for a possible EU accession have remained questionable (and trusting that accession alone would solve such problems would be naïve in any case), Turkey is not necessarily heading towards ever greater authoritarianism. Fundamentally divergent lines have developed in Turkey in conceptualizing democracy – a populist regime based on electoral victories, as proclaimed by the AKP government, versus the system of checks and balances in which the political minority's rights are crucial envisaged by the in itself heterogeneous civic opposition. This conceptual rift cannot easily be eliminated. The wave of protests which began at Gezi Park has shown that civic consciousness has emerged in segments of Turkish society that demand complete freedom to use their

rights to participation and freedom, and that this will influence the country's struggle for further democratization. The emergence of a concerned civil society improves the prospects of Turkey deepening its democratization process in the future. External agents cannot solve the domestic power struggles, but reliable support of those actors who are actively supporting civil rights in Turkey is nevertheless needed. European politics can be instrumental in backing such a development through cultural diplomacy and the accession criteria. Not least in importance, however, is that rather than acting on the basis of opportunistic situationalism – with interest in Turkey increasing whenever it suits EU interests of the day, such as in the European Union's current "refugee crisis" – Europe needs to become a reliable negotiating partner for Turkey.



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## **1. Introduction:**

### **The Turkish tradition of governing with polarizing politics**

When Angela Merkel spoke on the phone to Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on the day after the parliamentary elections of 1 November 2015, she congratulated him on the peaceful nature of the election process and on the extent to which the Turkish people felt committed to democracy, as reflected by the high turnout of voters. Furthermore, she welcomed his announcement of his desire to overcome the polarization and tensions within Turkish society (Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung 2015). While the existing polarization does in fact mark Turkey's political reality to a considerable extent, it seems questionable whether the reelected AKP (Justice and Development Party) will eventually become a force which bridges the deep rifts that cut through Turkish society. In the past decade, the party initially stood for a political renewal of the country. It triggered an impressive reform process which boosted the economy and made it possible for the country to satisfy a number of EU accession criteria. Moreover, in its early years the AKP government started an initiative for a peace process with the Kurds and thus inspired hope for the formulation of a new social contract. However, these achievements have increasingly faded into the background. In the shadow of the Syrian war zone, the Kurds in southeast Turkey are today again being treated as fifth-column activists. Recent years have also revealed monopolistic tendencies within AKP leadership, which have created serious social division and forms of protest new to Turkey. In its reactions to the latter, the AKP abandoned much of the effort for democratic consolidation of the country and encouraged polarization rather than promote societal peace.

And yet, the AKP has remained the only possible political address for many Turks. With the high turnout and another triumphant election victory in November of 2015, the party can revel in having such solid backing throughout the country that it enjoys a comfortable majority in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and does not need to seek compromises with political opponents, even though continuing attempts to monopolize the state will deepen existing rifts further: Of Turkey's 81 provinces, opposition parties won only 18 in November (six provinces in the westernmost parts of the country were won by the Kemalist CHP; 12 provinces were won by the pro-Kurdish HDP in the Southeast where Kurds are most numerous).<sup>1</sup> In view of the uncompromising style and majoritarian techniques of government that the AKP has established over the past years, it is hard to imagine that – and how – Prime Minister Davutoğlu could overcome the aggravated political divisions. What has become evident in public clashes over political decisions and will be set out in this report is that the ruling AKP elite and their political opponents represent fundamentally different conceptions of democracy: While the government and other dominant groups stress the electoral regime and majoritarian legitimacy of decision-

1 See <http://secim.aa.com.tr/indexENG.html> (8.3.2016).

making, the social segments dissenting from this narrow understanding stress participatory decision-making and the protection of minority rights as crucial benchmarks. The 2013 Gezi protest wave has brought these contrasting stances to the surface in a very visible manner, and will therefore serve as our case in point. The positions taken on this in the Turkish political arena mirror the academic debate concerning different types of democracy and what they imply.

There is no single definition of democracy. Diamond defines it “as a system for choosing a government through free and fair elections” (Diamond 2003: 28). This (probably most popular) definition has been criticized as a “fallacy called ‘electoralism’” (Schmitter/Karl 1991: 78). The broader understanding of “liberal democracy” includes respect for human rights. It focuses on the idea that citizens must enjoy possibilities for expressing and representing their interests and values beyond elections and party representation (Diamond 2003: 30; 34–35). Another definition of democracy emphasizes pluralism as one essence of the political system. According to Dahl’s definition, “pluralist democracy” recognizes in principle the existence of multiple centers of power. Ideally this has the effect that 1) power is tamed, 2) the consent of as many citizens as possible is promoted, and 3) peaceful settlements of conflicts become more likely (Dahl 1967, in Manley 2003: 382). As the latest definition of democracy, “participatory democracy” has drawn more and more attention among scholars. It describes a “collective decision making process” in which “citizens have the power to decide on policy proposals and politicians assume the role of policy implementation” (Aragonès/Sánchez-Pagés 2008: 1). All of these different understandings of democracy are present in Turkish society’s struggle for further democratization.

Divergences within Turkish society involving different views of the right path for development have a tradition that extends back to Ottoman times. When the republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 the modernization project of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his followers set the goals for the country’s development in the decades to follow: The sweeping reforms that were implemented immediately after the foundation of the republic rested on the state founder’s ideological pillars of (1) republicanism, (2) nationalism, (3) populism, (4) stateism, (5) secularism, and (6) revolutionism.<sup>2</sup> For about a decade the young republic of Turkey experienced a westernization program that included *inter alia* the secularization of the law and of the judiciary, the introduction of a unified state school system, the recognition of the equality of men and women – including equal political rights – and the banning of Ottoman and religious dress elements (such as the *fez*, and headscarves) from state institutions. Influenced by the era’s normative model of a unitary and secular nation state, the principles of nationalism and secularism lie at the heart of Kemalism. The vision of a homogeneous Turkish nation state crystallized in the figure of the Turkish citizen as an

2 The particular understandings of these principles in the context of the Kemalist ideology are explained in the publications of the Atatürk Society, see <http://theataturksocietyofcanada.ca/mka/revolutions/ataturks-principles/> (8.3.2016). Taşpınar 2005 gives a crisp summary of the Kemalist construction of Turkishness and of the Turkish republican project as a whole.

ethnic Turk and a secular member of the polity (although Sunni Muslim). This construction – and its conflation of national citizenship and ethnic identification under the single label of Turkishness – meant the delegitimation of the multi-confessional and multi-ethnic character that had defined Imperial Ottoman society. The historical exchange of groups of populations with neighboring Greece was motivated by this imagined national community just as much as the attempted Turkification politics vis-à-vis the Kurds, who had not been granted their own nation state in the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne.

Not surprisingly, the implementation of the Kemalist modernization project met with resistance from different sections of Turkish society from an early stage: It excluded the existing plurality conceptually, and banned religion in order to delegitimize it as a possible source for public moral order:<sup>3</sup> Ethnic minorities such as in particular the Kurds, whose striving for their own state had been ignored at the end of World War I, were not willing to subscribe to the nationalist construction of the Turkish citizenry. And the radical version of secularism, i.e., secularism informed by French republicanism pushed through by state founder Mustafa Kemal created just as much dissent across the country. These lines of opposition persisted. The Turkish sociologist Şerif Mardin became famous in the 1970s for voicing his argument that Turkish society had been divided into two elements since the Ottoman Empire, “the center” and “the periphery,” and that this separation continued in the Turkish Republic. The center represented the urban, elitist, modernist part of society, which followed and embraced Atatürk’s westernization reforms, and the periphery involved the rural, conservative and religiously oriented people who were neglected by the Turkish state ideology in terms of their ethnic or religious identities (Mardin 1973; see also Rose/Özcan 2007 on the extended duration of the period during which Anatolia lagged behind).

In view of these longstanding divisions between rural and religious segments, the Kurdish minority and the Kemalist nation-state establishments, it might be thought that the present rift which PM Ahmet Davutoğlu announced his intention of tackling would follow the same traditional lines, if with reversed power positions: The ruling AKP which has been in office since 2002 with landslide election victories,<sup>4</sup> does represent values that were

3 It would not have been possible to push through the Kemalist modernization project if there had been more political players in the arena: During the first two decades the Turkish Republic was governed by the Kemalist CHP in a single-party system, and the military was given a central role as the guardian of the Kemalist state ideology. Multi-party democracy became established only in 1946, and the military intervened repeatedly in domestic politics with coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980, all of which was based on the safeguarding role of the military introduced by the former officer Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

4 In addition to the success of the AKP in the general elections, a referendum in 2010 also showed a very high level of satisfaction in the electorate: The referendum was conducted on the question of changing the constitution of 1982 that had been passed after the last military coup and contained a number of undemocratic restrictions of rights. The referendum that was proposed by the AKP received 57% of votes, despite public criticism by the opposition parties who felt that they had been passed over. The constitutional amendments included a weakening of the military generals’ power, better protection of personal freedoms and civil liberties, and changes in the judicial body. For more information, see [www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2010/09/turkeys\\_constitutional\\_referendum](http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2010/09/turkeys_constitutional_referendum) (8.3.2016).

neglected by the Kemalist elites but remained relevant for broad sections of Turkey's population. And the fact that, unlike most other political parties in Turkey, the AKP has embraced the periphery, accounts at least partially for the party's enduring success: "The AKP is the party of the periphery and seeks to restore the center politics by stressing the 'enduring values' of the society" (Yavuz 2009: 61). However, as we argue in this report, the traditional divide between an urban elite of secular republicans versus a rural population that clings more to conservative moral values, nationalists and parties with religious backgrounds no longer applies: There is only one big city province where the AKP did *not* gain the majority of votes in November 2015, namely Izmir – which is traditionally the most secular and westernized city in Turkey as expressed in the colloquial nickname of "Gâvur İzmir" ('infidel Izmir'). Apart from this continuity, the landscape of political identities appears to have changed fundamentally in Turkey and to reflect the conflict lines involving different conceptions of democracy that emerged during the AKP's tenure and as one effect of the reforms that were launched early in the new millennium. These conflict lines challenge the consolidation of democracy in Turkey unless they enter the forum for political dialogue.

- In this report we take a closer look at the political developments that Turkey has experienced since the AKP first took office in 2002, in order to highlight the dynamic interaction that has come into effect between liberalizing reforms and their pluralizing consequences on the one hand, and the simultaneous polarization of (in part newly emerged) political identities on the other hand. To this end in the first section we will briefly review the performance of the ruling political party since its first term of office. It will be argued here that in qualitative terms the AKP represents a new political phenomenon in Turkey, and is not just another religious party like those that entered the country's political arena and quickly disappeared again in the 1980s and 1990s. From this perspective, the year 2002 can be viewed as a turning point for Turkey.
- Economic growth, the promise of enlarged civic rights and especially increased interactions with the rest of the world have had social consequences and changed the political aspirations and democracy expectations of many Turks, in particular in the younger generation. Expressions of these changes are described in the second chapter. A hitherto unknown civic consciousness has emerged in Turkey in the past decade, and has led to forms of exercising citizenship which were received with unease and finally responded to with oppression by the ruling AKP. This confrontation surfaced most pronouncedly during the so called Gezi Park protest wave in 2013–2014, but it started as early as 2006/2007 when the government was challenged by the leadership of the Turkish military, by actors from the "deep state," by civil servants in the judiciary and by a purpose-built platform which called itself "the concerned civil society." Although recent years' tendencies towards a growing rift can thus be traced back to key events which may well have shown where the last bastions of traditional Kemalism were located, the lines of the polarization no longer follow the old pattern. To show this and cast light on the new positions that are being taken and argued, and on what motivates political mobilization against the government, we will – in chapter three – focus on events surrounding the Gezi Park occupation in 2013 and 2014. In this section, the report presents findings from survey data and illustrates their meaning

with the help of semi-structured interviews which we conducted in 2013, 2014 and 2015 with residents of Istanbul who had either joined or critically observed the protest.<sup>5</sup> These voices do not have the status of representative data in the quantitative sense, but they demonstrate self-reflective grassroots stances that mirror Turkish society's internal developments that preceded the Gezi phenomenon in a condensed form and are as such extremely informative.

- While the protest wave is over, and its long-term impact must wait to be evaluated, the Gezi events revealed new political orientations that continue to influence the country's struggle for further democratization. Finally, therefore, in the conclusion, this report looks at prospects for future development. Although the picture that emerges from our report may appear rather pessimistic – in particular when it comes to the oppressive tendencies of the last AKP government and the current backlash into a civil war in the Southeast, we do see a chance for Turkey to develop a more inclusive political culture and become a less polarized polity in the future. German politics can be instrumental in supporting such a development through the strategic use of soft power, the creation of spaces for meaningful deliberation, and investments in cultural diplomacy.

## **2. The ambivalent role of the AKP in the Turkish democratization process**

### **2.1 The year 2002: A turning point for Turkey**

Since the party's establishment, the AKP has polarized public opinion: It was either labeled an Islamist party whose true agenda was to be feared or it was interpreted as a positive development that a religiously conservative, value-based democratic movement had entered parliamentary democracy. The question has since been raised again and again as to whether such a "Muslim democracy" in Turkey would in the end mean a threat to democracy or an opportunity for developing a form of Islam that is accountable to democratic statehood and the rule of (secular) law. As a matter of fact, in a unique way the AKP has combined religious politics with economic liberalism, and has mobilized a new political movement with this truly unconventional combination (Kalyvas 2013: 199). In the hitherto strictly secularist Turkish republic it was a turning point when this new force formed the government for the first time. Yet, in terms of the political actions it has implemented, the AKP government has entailed surprises. Reforms which responded to EU requirements in such areas as the expansion of civil and minority rights, the civilianization of control over

5 All interview partners, who were students and active participants in the demonstrations at that time, were anonymized. Based on permission granted by them, the identities of NGOs' representatives and experts who were interviewed were not anonymized.

the state's powerful security institutions, or opening of the country's economy to wider participation in global market trading were implemented at breathtakingly rapid pace in the early years of the AKP's term of office. Among other initiatives, the implementation of security sector reforms and the opening of peace consultations with the Kurds are notable. All of this won respect for the political party even from political opponents, and it nourished the expectation that the party's agenda would foster further democratization as it entered the political mainstream (see Yavuz 2009).

### *The qualitative novelty of the AKP*

In 2001, Turkey had experienced one of the deepest and most harmful economic crises in the country's history. This created a window of opportunity for a new political party, the AKP. The Turkish electorate was longing for a political change as became clear from the landslide election victory of the new party in 2002. The AKP promoted itself with a globalist, neo-liberal approach, and combined this orientation towards market liberalization, integration into the global economy and better relations with the IMF with a pronounced religious conservatism and a heightened interest in accession to the European Union. With this agenda, the AKP positioned itself as "conservative democratic". In the party's 2002 Election Bulletin it says that "the AKP is democratic, conservative, reformist, and a modern party, which constantly seeks change, protects differences in togetherness, trusts the dynamism of society, and desires to establish a political understanding that is open to the improvements and innovations in the world" (AKP 2002: 11). In slightly different words, the party's political identity is described in the "2023" political vision statement on forward-looking goals as a unique form of conservatism, which "has been shaped by Turkey's socio-cultural characteristics and has a political style that has been shaped by Turkey's local dynamics" (AKP 2012: 4).

In view of the party's origins,<sup>6</sup> some analysts see this as just a new strategy of the Islamists involving reliance on the electoral process in order to strengthen their political and social influence. The political scientist Gamze Çavdar regards the AKP as a political Islamist

6 Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Islamic parties have faced state surveillance because of the fear of an intended Islamization of Turkey. In each case prior to the AKP's existence, these parties were banned and closed down because of their anti-secular agendas. On the other hand, in the 1970s Necmettin Erbakan entered politics with the movement called *Milli Görüş* (National View), which promoted traditional values, a "Muslim way of life" and a clear anti-westernization orientation. Erbakan founded several parties of this political direction such as the *Milli Nizam Partisi* (National Order Party) in 1970 or the *Milli Selamet Partisi* (National Salvation Party) in 1972. Both were also banned by the Turkish Constitutional Court. Those parties were succeeded by the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) in 1983. The party won the 1995 parliamentary elections and Erbakan became the first Prime Minister of Turkey with an Islamist ideology. After the closure of the Welfare Party in 1998, the *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party) replaced it but was banned in 2001 for the same reasons as the other Islamist parties previously. The elected MPs of the Virtue Party split into two directions: 1. traditionalists founded the *Saadet Partisi* (Felicity Party) and 2. Reformists have been represented by the AKP since 2001. Both of these parties are still operating because of amendments to the constitution, which made the banning of political parties more difficult in Turkey, following the EU reform conditions (Rabasa/Larrabee 2008).

party, which demonstrates "a willingness to participate in political and economic life" (Çavdar 2006: 478). According to her, "political Islamist groups rely on the electoral process to strengthen their political and social bases, and they accept incremental changes whenever the circumstances permit. [...] Second, it is not unusual for political Islamists to moderate their positions according to conjectural and structural changes in international and domestic settings. Islamist groups have often displayed pragmatic orientations, diverging from doctrinaire positions" (Çavdar 2006: 478).

This description of political Islamism applies at least to the way in which the AKP distinguishes itself from the Islamist parties that had come onto the political stage in Turkey earlier: while, for example, Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi [RP]) promoted itself as *not* being another mainstream party in the "system," the AKP gained success by adapting itself to suit the Turkish political system and striving to *become* the mainstream (Yavuz 2009: 3). In 2005, the party leader and then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan not only stated that the AKP was not an Islamist party but even rejected defining the AKP as Muslim-democrat (Taşpınar 2015). Certainly, this may simply have been pragmatic and was done in order to ensure political survival in Turkey. Yasin Aktay, an AKP ideologist, underpinned such suspicions when arguing that "conservative democracy was *the only legally possible identity available* to the AKP in the Turkish politics because it is illegal to establish and serve as a religious party in parliament" (Yavuz 2009: 2; emphasis added by authors). Yet, although it may only have been pragmatism, the AKP promised to bring about political change, raise the standard of living in Turkey. Five points in the party platform summarize these political aspirations:

- enactment of a new constitution based on the rule of law which secures the principles and standards of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights;
- protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of each citizen regardless of ethnic, religious or ideological background;
- full membership in the European Union and acceptance of the economic and political criteria of the EU<sup>7</sup>;
- development and economic stabilization (subsequently, a low unemployment rate and lower inflation were set as being among the most important goals);
- participatory democracy rather than parliamentary representation.

The last point draws on regulations in the Political Parties Act and Election Law, and affects especially the high election threshold of 10%. The latter had been criticized for a long time because of the limiting effects it has on a relatively large proportion of the electorate. The envisaged new constitution was promised to provide possibilities for wider participation and equal opportunities for securing fairer representation in the Turkish national

7 The 2002 Election Bulletin states that "these criteria must be adopted, even if EU membership would not be of concern" (AKP 2002: 13).



parliament<sup>8</sup> (AKP 2002: 8-26). The election promises attracted many votes and the AKP won an overwhelming majority of seats in 2002 right from the start (363 of 550 seats in parliament, but with only 34.3% of the votes).<sup>9</sup>

*The AKP, the European Union and the initial reform dynamics*

The AKP focused on accession to the European Union as one of its first goals, and initiated several reforms in order to improve Turkey's status as a membership candidate. This was observed carefully by the party's political opponents, who mistrusted the AKP. Some argued that the newly elected government wanted to distance itself from its non-secularist origins and re-create itself as an example of a conservative democratic political party that was compatible with European standards. More critical voices came from traditional Kemalists. They warned that EU membership criteria could easily be utilized to wreck Turkey's state bodies (Taşpınar 2015), because certain structural changes were required, such as sidelining the military, which had been the constitutional protector of the state order since its foundation).<sup>10</sup>

The period between the time when the AKP took office in November 2002 and when Turkey fulfilled the Copenhagen Criteria in 2004 was a period during which many reforms were quickly instituted. The European Union's Copenhagen Criteria for possible new member states entail political criteria, economic criteria and the acceptance of the Community "Acquis" i.e., the complete set of legal acts agreed upon by the EU member states. Among these criteria, the political ones determine whether negotiations start at all or not. This involves issues related to the quality of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and protection of minorities.<sup>11</sup> The beginning of the relevant negotiation process became accessible at the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002, when the Council decided that negotiations could start as early as 2004 if Turkey fulfilled the political criteria by that time (European Council 2003: 5). This prospect was a major reason why the AKP government pushed through some reforms in the very first years. Turkey had never been able to fulfil the EU's criteria before 2004, but in 2004 the European Commission presented

8 Curiously enough, two versions of the "2002 Election Bulletins" were published: The first one was published in 2002 and is available on the webpage of Grand National Assembly of Turkey: <http://bit.ly/1vvLFbB> (8.3.2016). The second one is available on the webpage of the AKP in a version that was published in 2015: [www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/2002-beyanname.pdf](http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/2002-beyanname.pdf) (8.3.2016). A section concerning the election threshold has been taken out in the newer version. However, the current Prime Minister Davutoğlu states in the foreword of the 2015 reprint: "The AKP is a self-questioning party, which [...] never promises something that it would not keep" (AKP 2015: Intro).

9 The results quoted are taken from the website of the Turkish Statistical Institute under the "Justice and Election" section: [www.turkstat.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist) (8.3.2016). Because of the 10% election threshold already mentioned, the 2002 general election ended with only two political parties (CHP and AKP) and nine independent individuals in parliament.

10 See Müftüler Baç 2005; Cizre/Menderes 2007 for a brief history of modern Turkey.

11 The EU website contains information about the conditions of accession: <http://bit.ly/1jNwskO> (8.3.2016).

a report regarding Turkey’s recent improvements and stated that Turkey did in fact fulfil the Copenhagen Criteria, so that accession negotiations could start. Subsequently, during the December 2004 summit in Brussels it was decided to begin accession negotiations in October 2005 (Nugent 2005: 5).

To meet the EU criteria, the AKP government introduced and enacted a total of five reform packages<sup>12</sup> during its first term, which entailed fundamental legal and institutional reforms such as:

- strengthening freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of association;
- total abolition of the death penalty;
- conversion of all death sentences to life imprisonment;
- a zero-tolerance policy towards torture and mistreatment;
- lifting the state of emergency in the southeast of Turkey, where the Kurdish minority group is most populous;
- abolishing the state security courts, which were established by the military government after the coup in 1982 to tackle state security issues such as terrorism and organized crime;
- improvements in minority rights, cultural rights and the protection of minorities; in particular, it became legal under these provisions to publish or broadcast on radio and television in languages other than Turkish;
- strengthening of civilian control over the military.

The amendments were perceived by many political opponents of the AKP as involving partisan use of the EU membership criteria in order to weaken the traditional elite of Kemalists and to extend the power base of the AKP (Çavdar 2006: 488):<sup>13</sup> For instance, limiting the power of the military by revising the *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (National Security Council) was a very important step in meeting EU standards on democratic civil-military relations; the military-dominated National Security Council was far too powerful politically. The reforms of the NSC increased the number of civilians in the Council. Furthermore, it was decided that a civilian could also act as the Secretary General of the NSC. This position had traditionally been held by a military council member (Müftüler Baç 2005: 26). Turkish

12 It should be noted that these reforms were originally not initiated by the AKP, but had been launched earlier by the previous coalition government led by Bülent Ecevit (CHP). Ecevit had only managed to get the first three packages passed by August 2002 when his term of office ended (Altıntaş 2008: 6–7; also see Altıntaş 2008 for a detailed description of the abovementioned reforms).

13 Hulusi Zeybel from the Human Rights Association in Istanbul drew attention to this flipside of the accession conditions: “The AKP and the European Union used each other. The European Union used the AKP for dissolving the traditional state structure and the Kemalist personnel cadre in Turkey. This military structure, military tutelage, what we call the military’s control over the politics was not fitting for the Union. And the European Union knew that the democratic channels would only open when military tutelage was overcome [...]. From that angle, the West used the AKP” (Hulusi Zeybel, interviewed on 7 April 2015).

nationalists did not approve of the changes in favor of cultural and minority rights either. They argued that cultural rights which were intended to improve the civil liberties of the Kurdish population in Turkey actually weakened the Turkish state: Extended rights would mean “giving in to the terrorists” (Müftüler Baç 2005: 24). Such identification of all Kurds with the PKK is part of the usual rhetoric in nationalist circles in Turkey.

Although criticism like this was voiced by Kemalists and by radical nationalists, the political reforms that were launched – or continued – by the AKP earned the party considerable respect and support across Turkey. The AKP itself explained in the program of the government led by Abdullah Gül between 2002 and 2003<sup>14</sup> that the AKP fostered the economic development and transformation of Turkey not simply to meet the EU criteria in this area, but mainly to improve living standards for the Turkish people (AKP 2002: 16). Related reform acts adapted the Turkish economy to the free market system and made foreign investment in Turkey more attractive (AKP 2002: 19). Even if the political economist Ziya Öniş argues that it was basically the “strong economy” program developed by then Minister of State Kemal Derviş<sup>15</sup> in 2001, which helped the country out of the crisis under AKP rule (Öniş 2012: 5; Müftüler Baç 2005: 24), the newly elected AKP government did not reject the reforms that had been designed by the previous coalition government but implemented them efficiently and rapidly as the majority power.

## 2.2 Five years later: Monopolizing tendencies

The continuity and stability of legal improvements for more liberties became less evident in the second period of AKP government. This period, which started in 2007, is regarded by most observers as the time when the first signs of monopolizing tendencies became visible. Prime Minister Erdoğan personalized the AKP’s power to a greater and greater extent. His turning to making religious references and morally patronizing comments created growing concern among secular and politically liberal circles in Turkish society. Many more commentators started to question the AKP’s intentions in their public statements. In addition, the EU’s Turkey Progress Report of 2008 stated that the legal framework for freedom of assembly was fully in line with European standards but that the actual practice was cause for serious concern. To give one example, demonstrations on first of May were banned from Taksim Square in Istanbul, and participants who ignored the ban faced severe police violence (European Commission 2008: 16). Later, in the second term of office, this tendency accelerated: Several court cases against journalists and caricaturists were opened on charges of alleged insults of Erdoğan or of the AKP. By 2012, more than 60 journalists

14 Abdullah Gül was only in charge as Prime Minister for one year and formed the government. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took over the position after his political ban (for unlawful religious activities) was removed in 2003.

15 Kemal Derviş served the Ministry of Economic Affairs between 2001–2002 under the coalition government led by Bülent Ecevit. He had previously worked at the World Bank.

were behind bars, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (Ognianova 2015). Reporters without Borders also drew attention to the decline in freedom of the press since 2007. At first, judicial freedom remained. However, as a result of a bill which the AKP formulated and had passed by parliament in February 2014, the Ministry of Justice gained more control over Supreme Court judges and prosecutors (HSYK). This was criticized as an attempt to “institutionalize direct government control of the judiciary” and for being in opposition to EU principles (Freedom House 2015). In April 2014, the Constitutional Court of Turkey decided in favor of a partial cancellation of these new regulations (Milliyet 2014).

When looking into Turkish domestic politics it can be seen that key events triggered the government’s movement towards increasingly authoritarian decision making that has undermined earlier reforms for liberalization of Turkish democracy. From 2007, the ruling AKP faced domestic challenges posed by resistance from the main opposition party CHP (the Kemalist Republican People’s Party) and from established state functionaries at the head of strong factions, especially in the military and in parts of the judiciary. In addition, the former ally of the AKP, the Gülen Movement,<sup>16</sup> distanced itself from the AKP leadership and by doing so created potential uncertainty for Erdoğan and his followers.

The first key event occurred during the presidential election of 2007: The AKP nominated Abdullah Gül, then Foreign Minister, as their candidate for the presidency. This was perceived by the secular sections of society as an open threat to one bastion of the Turkish republic, because Gül had openly argued that the secular state was an error (Tran 2007). Therefore, before the first round of the elections was held in April 2007, many civil society organizations together with the CHP called for mass demonstrations referred to as *cumhuriyet mitingleri* (“rally for the republic”) against the ruling AKP party (BBC 2007). To protest the AKP candidacy of Abdullah Gül, the CHP did not participate in the presidential elections and thus thwarting them: The election regulations require a quorum of two-thirds of the deputies in the first round in order to hold a presidential election (Eligür 2007: 2). The quorum could only be reached with CHP members of parliament. Consequently, the presidential election had to be repeated.

16 The Gülen movement is a non-partisan initiative which is rooted in the “humanistic tradition of Islam” and “inspired by the activism of Fethullah Gülen” according to its own description (see [www.gulenmovement.us/gulen-movement/what-is-the-gulen-movement](http://www.gulenmovement.us/gulen-movement/what-is-the-gulen-movement); 6.3.2016). Fethullah Gülen served as a preacher for the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs until 1981. Since 1999 he has resided in the United States due to charges against him for his alleged comments on the transformation of the existing system in Turkey in favor of Islam (Henry/Wilson 2004: 236). The AKP and the Gülen Movement shared common goals against deeply entrenched state structures and Kemalist military power (Kilinc 2015). Discord in this alliance started when the AKP and the Gülen Movement had a dispute over the Kurdish issue. In 2012, Hakan Fidan, head of the National Intelligence Organization, who was conducting secret talks with the PKK on behalf of the AKP government, was arrested. This was perceived by the government as an act of the Gülen followers in the police force, with the aim of disrupting these talks and harming government policies (El-Kazaz 2015: 4). Tensions increased when the AKP decided to close “prep schools” founded by Gülen for university examination in 2012. In 2013 Erdoğan and some other AKP politicians blamed the Gülen Movement for organizing and initiating the Gezi Park demonstrations (Akyol 2014).

The military – traditional guardian of republican principles – led an even more aggressive card than the CHP. During the night of the first round of presidential elections in parliament, the military leadership published a warning message regarding the elections on the Turkish Military's website. This stated that the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces might "openly display its reaction" (Independent Commission on Turkey 2009: 14). This statement was afterwards labeled an attempted "e-coup." It showed how the established elites tried to prevent state institutions from being governed – or, in their eyes, undermined – by the AKP government (Migdalovitz 2007: 2). Not only the government but also liberal circles and EU observers criticized the Turkish military leadership heavily for its political involvement. The then Justice Minister Cemil Çiçek declared it "unconceivable [sic] in a democratic-law state that the General Staff would use any phrase against the government on any matter. [...] The chief of the General Staff, in terms of his duty and authority, is accountable to the Prime Minister" (Tavernise 2007). In the same vein, the European Commission referred in the "Turkey 2007 Progress Report" to a problematic "tendency for the military to make public comments on issues going beyond its remit" (European Commission 2007: 9).

The military's interventionist attempt was a substantial challenge and was immediately responded to by the AKP leadership. The AKP recognized from this incident how urgent it was to establish civilian control over the military. Hence, Erdoğan called for an early parliamentary election to gain votes from liberals in Turkey too, who opposed interference by the military in politics. And indeed, the parliamentary elections of July 2007 resulted in three political parties winning seats (AKP, CHP and MHP) and gave the AKP 341 of 550 seats in parliament (for 46.6% of the votes). Commentators assessed this election success as being a public rebuke to the generals (Taşpınar 2015). With this strong majority, the second round of the presidential election in August 2007 produced a successful result for Abdullah Gül, which was "fully in line with the rule of law and international democratic standards" (European Commission 2007: 8). In the domestic power struggle, these two elections signified victory for the AKP government over the established elites in the traditionally entrenched Turkish military.

The second key event occurred when the Supreme Court of Appeal's chief prosecutor demanded the dissolution of the AKP and the banning of 71 AKP politicians from politics in 2008 (Independent Commission on Turkey 2009: 14). The reason was the prosecutor's judgement that "the AKP became the center of the activities against secularism" (Özbudun 2013: 73). In accordance with this assessment, six of the eleven Supreme Court judges decided in favor of the dissolution of the party that governed Turkey with a majority of the seats in parliament. However, due to provisions of the Turkish constitution, six out of eleven votes was not sufficient for imposing the ban and for suspending any politicians. Instead, the court decided on a financial sanction against the AKP for controversial activities by the party regarding constitutional secularism (European Commission 2008: 69). This attempt at dissolving the ruling party shows that the old elite was trying to prevent the AKP-led transformation leading to a liberalization of the strict secularism that had guided the conception of modern statehood in Turkey since 1923.

In addition to these two key events, which demonstrated resistance against the shift in power, the AKP's growing electoral successes since 2002 also contributed to a growing intolerance of criticism.<sup>17</sup> Winning more and more of the vote in each election since 2002 indicates that the AKP satisfied voters, even though public criticism of the party was growing simultaneously because of its greater monopolizing tendencies. This polarization has intensified and continues to influence the country's political life. Part of this is not new to the country, as already mentioned: Şerif Mardin's explanation of a society divided into a "center" and "the periphery" since Ottoman times (Mardin 1973) still appears plausible today. Yet even though, unlike most other political parties in Turkey, the AKP has embraced "the periphery," it has – as a new political force – also triggered a process of societal and political diversification that affects both the former "periphery" and the former "center." For one thing, a mass of voters from the formerly neglected parts of society support the AKP because the party offers some consolation for the long-experienced exclusion. For another thing, the improvements achieved in the Turkish "Anatolian tiger economy" are also continuing, with roughly 7% annual growth in GDP since the AKP first took office. In many suddenly booming cities this growth created wealthier middle and lower classes who have made up the electorate of the AKP from the beginning (Lagendijk 2013: 184). The inability of the opposition parties to promote their alternative visions and develop new alliances, and many people's fear of another financial crisis are factors that have helped stabilize this support (Tremblay 2014; Dalay 2013).

### **2.3 The AKP as an engineer in Turkey's moral economy**

The challenges of their position cited above and the growing electoral popularity of the AKP encouraged the party's leaders to adopt a more forceful approach starting in 2006/07. Since then, some scholars have started to characterize the AKP's path as one of "Muslim nationalism" (White 2014) and have stated that this feature has gained the upper hand more and more since the first power crises some ten years ago. This argument draws on instances that show how especially PM Erdoğan has started referring to religion as the common moral ground when addressing the electorate (Uluengin 2013 cited from Özbudun 2014: 157). Religious references became ever more apparent in speeches after a successful 2010 referendum on constitutional amendments, which the AKP perceived as broadly based approval by the electorate of AKP politics.<sup>18</sup> For example, in 2012, then Prime Minister Erdoğan declared in public how his party defined the role of Islam in current government

17 Some other events also indicated the existence of tensions between the new political force and the old elites, i.e. (1) the "Ergenekon case" and also the abovementioned power struggles with the Gülen Movement. The Ergenekon case investigation in 2007 involved an underground nationalist criminal group which wanted to overthrow the AKP violently. As a result of this court case, many officers – including the former Chief of Staff – were arrested (European Commission 2012: 7).

18 By holding the referendum, the AKP government took the decision away from the Turkish National Assembly after a number of fruitless consultation rounds with the parliamentary opposition.

politics: “We have four main red [important] topics: one state, one nation, one flag and one religion” (T24 2012). As a vision of collective identity this description would match the label of “Muslim nationalism” described by Jenny White (2014). Such a vision meets with a great deal of consent throughout Turkey. Yet, of course, it also raises fundamental opposition and concern in the country that for almost seventy years had cultivated a form of strict secularism modeled after France.

Although Erdoğan’s statement on “one religion” was relativized by the AKP vice president Hüseyin Çelikkas as having been a “slip of the tongue,” other instances show that normative references to Islamic education, lifestyle and ethics were used in order to influence Turkey’s public moral economy. The term “moral economy” (Thompson 1971; Fassin 2005) captures the references and disagreements surrounding the repository of normative ideas about the moral substance that constitutes good citizenship performance.<sup>19</sup> Modern democracies are based on meritocratic values and on morals that refer to ideas of justice, fairness, reciprocity, and solidarity (Rawls 1971, 2001) which are crucial resources for the way in which citizens are meant to regulate their freedom of choice in their private and public lives. In the republic of Turkey the central guiding norms for these regulations were traditionally codified in the ideology of Kemalism – including strict secularism. With the AKP in office, attempts at shaping a different moral economy have gained more space: The “moral substance” which citizens are meant to acquire, both individually and collectively, should be constructed in such a way that Turkishness and Sunni Muslim belief are intertwined, and that religion works as a common moral resource of the polity. AKP representatives – first and foremost, the party’s leading figure Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – have been adopting a morally patronizing tone when referring to this ideal of Islamic norms and values as the essence of Turkish citizenship. To give some examples of this:

- Women in Turkey have the right to abortion until the tenth week of their pregnancies without needing any consent from their partner. In 2012, Erdoğan stated that he wanted every couple to have at least three babies because Turkey needed a young and dynamic population in the coming years (quoted from Radikal 2012).
- The government introduced a new school system known as the 4+4+4 education system in 2012. It requires 12 years of compulsory education, with four years each of primary, middle school and high school. Before introduction of this new school system, children had five years of compulsory primary school and three years of secondary school (*Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı* 2012). The new system also involved amendments in favor of a more religious education: schools specializing in Islamic education, *Imam Hatip* schools, became recognized as regular secondary education institutions (education of children

19 The concept of moral economy is informative for the analysis of the formation of political identities. It dates back to Edward Thompson’s studies of the normative roots of social groups that revolted against impending changes to society’s economic and social fabric during the industrialization of England (1971). Didier Fassin used it to analyse the rationalities that have been informing immigration policy in France since the 1950s (Fassin 2005).

between 15 and 18) as part of the reform package. These schools had previously been limited to offering religious education and to training clergymen. Many more of these schools opened as a result of being granted recognition, whereas many regular state schools that had previously offered three years of secondary education disappeared or were transformed into *Imam Hatip* schools.<sup>20</sup> In response to the opposition’s criticism of this educational intervention, Erdoğan made it clear that, “the aim of my party as a conservative democratic party, is raising a pious generation, not atheists” (quoted from *Hürriyet* 2012).

- Finally, in 2013, the Prime Minister’s comments on mixed gender housing of university students showed an inclination to intervene in people’s private lives and invoke a moral mission for justification. Erdoğan called people who share houses immoral and added that, “it is not clear what is happening in those houses. It is the state’s duty to protect their children. We are involved in this, as a conservative democratic party” (quoted from *Milliyet* 2013c).

These examples are illustrative of moralizing interventions that lean towards an ideal of the Turkish citizen who draws on the Islamic religion as the moral resource for regulating public and private life. Marc Pierini, who acted as the European Union’s representative in Turkey between 2006 and 2011, concluded that “the ruling party has ramped up efforts to impose its own religious-conservative views on society, using the majority it acquired in three successive legislative elections as justification. The coexistence of different lifestyles is not a goal” (Pierini 2013: 1). Citizens with liberal or secular backgrounds also criticized the Prime Minister’s patronizing moralization and the AKP’s presumptuous understanding of democracy as mere majority rule. Subsequently this spirit of opposition surfaced in the events surrounding Gezi Park at Taksim Square in Istanbul.

20 According to the Turkish union of teachers *Eğitim-Sen* (Education and Science Workers’ Union), in 2003 there were 450 *Imam Hatip* Schools in Turkey, with 71,100 students. These numbers increased to 952 schools with 474,096 students by 2014 (T24 2014). One reason for the attractiveness of *Imam Hatip* schools is their relatively liberal admission policy: Admission to high schools is only possible after taking central examinations which are held by the Ministry of Education, and students have to receive a certain score. *Imam Hatip* schools also accept students who have either not participated in the examination or have scored badly (Cengiz 2014). The only other option for them would be to attend a vocational school (Daloğlu 2013b).



### 3. The Gezi protest wave: Emergence of a new civic opposition

The protest wave initially began on 27 May 2013 in the form of an occupation of the Gezi Park to protest the government's urban development project in the Taksim Square area: A shopping mall was planned in the shape of an Ottoman barracks. The small park would hence be doomed to disappear. When these plans became known in public, an environmentalist platform voiced criticism and occupied the park area with a tent camp. The protest against the project reached its peak on 31 May, when police set the protestors' tents on fire. This escalation triggered the growth of solidarity actions throughout the country: According to the final police force report, the Gezi events mobilized protest in all 81 provinces of Turkey except for one city (the garrison town of Bayburt). Estimated participation in the public protest actions reached 3.6 million people by the first week of September 2013 (Bianet 2013), and altogether, the demonstrations left more than 8,000 people injured, according to the Turkish Medical Organization, among them 600 police officers (Amnesty International 2013: 15). In one report on the protest wave, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)<sup>21</sup> states that, during the demonstrations, nine people died as a result of police violence, including beatings, shooting of tear gas cannons directly at their heads, direct or indirect inhalation of tear gas, and one police car crash (FIDH 2014: 8–9).

The extent of the protest and the speed of mobilization indicate that much more was at stake than local concerns of an environmentalist movement. And the forms that were taken to demonstrate protest were markedly different from the forms of resistance that the AKP had previously been confronted with from the old state bureaucracy. It should be kept in mind that the Taksim area is a traditional place for demonstration and has been loaded with high symbolic meaning since the anti-communist, military-backed counter-guerrillas shot 34 protestors to death there on 1 May 1977. With the planned construction project, Taksim Square would have been lost as a place for demonstrations, as the Ministry of the Interior announced (Farro/Demirhisar 2014: 177). The plans were hence perceived by part of the Turkish public as an attempt to wreck elements of the collective memory regarding the historical importance of this particular urban space.

#### 3.1 Citizenship exercised unconventionally

Professional observers of the Gezi protest stress that it differentiates itself from other protest forms in modern Turkish history: It was very spontaneous and so heterogeneous in terms of participating groups of the population that it expressed and at the same time created a special atmosphere of pluralist tolerance. Especially after the violent attacks of the police on

21 The abbreviation FIDH is derived from the French name "Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme".

the first protestors in the park, many people came together and occupied the area in question in the name of solidarity. The transformation of the demonstration's form and theme made the Gezi Park a stage for each and every one who felt under pressure from AKP government policies. The protest thus came to unite segments of Turkish society from different ethnic, religious or ideological groups such as Kurds, Turks, Armenians, Alevis, Sunnis, LGBT activists, Kemalists and also traditional Nationalists – something that had never happened before (Göle 2013: 13). Empirical surveys that were conducted once it became clear that the Gezi protest would be more than just a demonstration over a few days all stress this unique feature of a very heterogeneous and at the same time very mutually accepting group of people. However, individual motivation for joining the protest was scarcely documented. Consequently, to gain some deeper insight into what moved the people who were involved in the protest we conducted semi-structured interviews with students, political experts, NGO representatives and scholars based in Istanbul, and asked about their personal experiences, motivations and interpretations of the events.<sup>22</sup> The results show different facets of discontent with the government's entrepreneurial role in the public moral economy, and they reveal fundamental differences in the conceptualization of democracy and the prerequisites of democratization between the AKP government and those who put their rights as citizenship into practice by protesting.

One of our interview partners, Tayfun Kahraman, a representative of "Taksim Solidarity" and a teacher in the city planning department at Mimar Sinan University, described the protests exactly in this sense as a "boiling point"<sup>23</sup> that occurred because many people could no longer stand the government's "neo-Ottomanism."<sup>24</sup> The Ottoman frame of reference played a role in the development project for the Taksim Square area insofar as the

22 Three series of interviews were held: (1) with academic and NGO experts on Turkish domestic politics and the security sector in September of 2013 in Istanbul and Izmir, (2) with 16 people, who are all residents of Istanbul and observed the Gezi protest wave. These were conducted during two time periods: the first round took place in October of 2014 with university students from Bachelor and Master studies between 18 and 30 years of age. All participating students were enrolled in social sciences faculties at three different universities in Istanbul: Istanbul University, Boğaziçi University and Galatasaray University. These universities are state universities and each one represents a particular *ecole*: Istanbul University is the oldest university in Turkey, established in 1453 and with around 70,000 students also the biggest university; Boğaziçi University's language of instruction is English and it is known for its American orientation; Galatasaray University was established in 1994 as the successor of the French High School, with French as the language of instruction. (3) The second round of interviews was held in April of 2015 with experts, representatives, founders or volunteers from human rights organizations, and international or local non-governmental organizations in Istanbul. The organizations were chosen with regard to their fields of action and expertise such as human rights, development, and governance. All interviewees' names were anonymized unless they agreed to be identified by name.

23 Interview with Tayfun Kahraman on 6 April 2015.

24 Nostalgia for the Ottoman period and for respect and honour of the "*ecdad*" (ancestry) occupies a central place in AKP symbolism in several areas. Erdoğan also repeatedly praised the past "personalization of power" seen in Ottomanism. This historic and clearly anti-democratic reference can be interpreted as signifying the desire to increase his own personalized power, as sociologist Nilüfer Göle suggested (Göle 2013: 11).

planned construction was meant to replicate the historical military barracks that had been located in the Gezi Park during the Ottoman Empire. In view of the wave of public protest, Erdoğan stated that the rebuilding of the military barracks would take place no matter what society said (Daloğlu 2013a). Tayfun Kahraman, who participated in a meeting on this with then Prime Minister Erdoğan, described the latter's behavior as follows:

"It was a tense meeting. [...] He [Erdoğan] mentioned continuously that it [shopping mall] was an architectural project. When we told him that it had become more than a protest against the architectural project and that it had gained another dimension because of the police violence, dead people on the streets and the authoritarian reactions, the atmosphere in the meeting became sterner. Right afterwards it was ended and Erdoğan left the meeting." (Tayfun Kahraman, interviewed 6 April 2015)

While the government continued to show no willingness to consider political opponents' views, exactly this tendency to insist on the legal rights of an elected government to push through a certain decision created important momentum for a considerable degree of politicization, and triggered a mass mobilization.

#### *Mobilization against police violence*

In addition to different political party orientations, the initial idea behind the Gezi Protest was the symbolic act of showing dissent by means of an unarmed demonstration and political slogans (Göle 2013: 7). This assessment dominated the discourse of critical observers, and it was echoed among our interview partners. Many made it clear that they conceived the Gezi protest as having been "peaceful" or "innocent". The 18-year-old sociology student Özgür in an exemplary statement described the protest as a "peaceful" act of "aware" people, "who do know how to protest and where to stop, where to start."<sup>25</sup> Seeing how the state security forces behaved in response mobilized a large number of supporters even though many people were afraid to attend gatherings at Taksim Square because of the risk of becoming a victim of police violence. Many of the students who were interviewed described their personal "urge" to join the protest in this way in our interviews.

It is important to note that, according to several surveys, large numbers of young people who had never participated in any demonstrations before the Gezi events were among the various groups who joined the protest. Especially the quantitative research that was carried out by KONDA in the park during the protests contains interesting information about the people who were out on the streets. According to the KONDA surveys, almost 70 percent of them were aged between 18 and 30, hence representing the so-called Generation Y (KONDA 2014: 23), a common denominator for people born between the 1980s and late 1990s. They have grown up with constantly increasing availability of modern technology, and share tendencies to define themselves as socially responsible, tolerant regarding differences and feeling confident about their prospects for a good life (KONDA 2014: 90). This generation communicates a lot with the help of social media such as Facebook or

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Özgür on 26 October 2014.

Twitter, which played an enormous role in the Gezi protests: The established Turkish mainstream media did not inform the public about the events. Consequently, some protestors started to act as "voluntary journalists" and broadcast from the streets where clashes occurred between the police and demonstrators. As a result of this flow of information and pictures, many people obtained news that mobilized them to take action.

According to exploratory research carried out by Esra Ercan Bilgiç and Zehra Kafkaslı during the protests on 3 to 4 June 2013, Erdoğan's authoritarian habitus in the immediate conflict situation was the first important trigger for many people to go out and join the demonstrations. Their research revealed furthermore that police violence played a crucial role as a reason for the spontaneous mass support of the protestors in the park. In the ranking of motives this is immediately followed by desire to protest against the restrictions that had been imposed on democratic rights (Ercan Bilgiç/Kafkaslı 2013: 21). Altogether, 17 political desires were identified by this research among the demonstrators, four of which are particularly relevant in terms of the extent to which they were articulated: (1) a need for respect for the freedom of the people; (2) the AKP should pay attention to the voices of non-AKP voters; (3) in decisions regarding the public sphere, the local administration should listen to the demands of the affected public; (4) police violence must stop (Ercan Bilgiç/Kafkaslı 2013: 8).

It can be concluded that, for one thing, the wave of demonstrations starting with the Gezi Park protests made visible the extent to which Turkey's society, and especially young people who had come of age when the reforms for more civil rights were launched during the AKP's early years, had in the meantime diversified and become conscious of the citizenry's democratic participation rights. For another thing a strong desire for more far-reaching democratization of Turkish public policy was to be heard in the protests. With their conceptualization of citizenship as participation that was put into practice in the wave of demonstrations, this new opposition not only differs notably from the citizenship ideals promoted by the ruling political party, but also differentiates itself from the understandings that the traditional Kemalists had established. We will explain the conceptual divergences in more detail in the next section, and contextualize their implications with the use of interview material that contains exemplary statements.

### **3.2 Lines of conceptual divergence**

In spite of the wide spectrum of participants in the wave of Gezi demonstrations and despite the dissemination of the protest events across the whole country, there is a huge second faction in Turkey that follows the AKP almost unconditionally and continues to support even the government's interpretation of democracy as simply meaning the majority's rule. There are of course frictions among AKP supporters, too.<sup>26</sup> However, the conceptual

26 This is an insufficiently studied field, and will be the subject of further research by us.

divergences that have become visible in recent years run along the lines of being either *for* or *against* the AKP government and its concept of democracy. Critical political issues that were tackled by the AKP in the early years such as the peace process initiated with the Kurds and the debate on a new constitution with broader civil rights were noted with satisfaction by many observers of the country's democratization process in and outside Turkey. But many of the promising projects experienced severe backlash. Party political controversies, the unexpected rise of a new opposition party in the shape of the liberal and pro-Kurdish HDP, and the – for numerous reasons – until recently stagnating EU accession negotiations prompted the AKP leaders, and most prominently Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to display an increasingly high-handed attitude towards political opponents. The rapid change in direction from the initial reform promises deepened the polarization. Being either for or against the AKP has become a central point for political identification over the past decade, and it has created a tense atmosphere in Turkish society (KONDA 2013: 88). This phenomenon contributed to triggering the Gezi Park demonstrations and also accounts for their quick transformation from a protest concerning environmental issues into a site of much greater political salience.

Almost all our interviewees, whether students, critical observers or political experts, made the point that Erdoğan's style of leadership had either led to or gravely intensified a socio-political polarization that works to sustain the AKP's power position: The representative of the Human Rights Association, Hulusi Zeybel, said that the AKP would "promote this polarization strategy, but not only the religious polarization, also the ethnic polarization because it provided them with more votes" (Hulusi Zeybel, interviewed 7 April 2015). İtir Akdoğan from the HABITAT Centre for Development and Governance in Istanbul stated that for political reasons polarization even took the shape of mutual hatred, since the youth was put at the center of discussions surrounding the Gezi Park protests.<sup>27</sup> And the political scientist Biriz Berksoy from Istanbul University expressed the view that all of this was not coincidental. She labeled the escalation-prone acts and speeches that especially (then) Prime Minister Erdoğan had become known for "a governance technique".<sup>28</sup> In fact, the Gezi Park protest was differently instrumentalized depending on this division: On the one hand, there were Erdoğan's derogatory assessments. He called the demonstrators looters ("çapulcu") and condemned them for being "puppets of foreign powers who do not want Turkey to progress" or "vandals who have nothing to do with environmental concerns" (Taştan 2013:28). On the other hand, the Republican People's Party CHP, which is still the main opposition party, tried to usurp the Gezi protestors for their own purposes when praising them as "heroes armed with global values" (Taştan 2013: 28). These assessments draw on sharply contrasting perspectives on the ways citizens and the state are construed as relating to each other, and in the valuation of fundamental rights.

27 Interview with İtir Akdoğan on 8 April 2015.

28 Interview with Biriz Berksoy on 9 September 2013.

*Democracy: Elections or more?*

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, elections have been the most important feature of democracy in the country, and in fact, for a long time they provided the only possibility for many people to participate in politics. Historically, male Turkish citizens have enjoyed voting rights since 1927, female citizens since 1930 in local elections, and since 1934 at the national parliament level. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's party, the CHP, was first elected and regularly won the elections until the multi-party period was started in 1946.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Turkey successfully managed to consolidate the election system and can be considered a functioning electoral democracy. Electoral reforms that were implemented after the military coup of 1980 even made voting compulsory, so that the turnout at the ballot box is high.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Turkey's electoral system contains an extremely high threshold of 10 percent, which keeps political minorities out of parliament and favors the predominance of a few powerful parties (see Louter/Lyons 2015). The Kurdish politicians from the *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (The Peoples' Democratic Party) who gained seats in parliament had run for elections as individual persons first and formed a group in parliament afterwards under their party name in order to avoid the exclusionary effects of the 10 percent threshold.

In other words, institutionalized disregard of pluralism has been cultivated since the foundation of the republic and used both by the Kemalists and other ruling parties such as, currently, the AKP. It is one of the core problems fueling the entrenched intolerance of alternative voices in Turkey. The political scientists Fuat Keyman and Meltem Müftüler Baç conclude that "it is precisely because the Turkish political system is characterized by low tolerance for diverse views and a tendency to suppress dissenting voices that Turkish political leaders with authoritarian leanings are able to take advantage of these systemic attributes to voice their own repressive rhetoric" (Müftüler Baç/Keyman 2015: 5). Ironically enough, exactly this political mechanism was criticized by the AKP in 2002 before the elections were held that brought them into office. In the first party program of the AKP, it is frequently stated that the AKP's aim is to consolidate a pluralist democracy.<sup>31</sup>

Since the 2013 wave of demonstrations which begin with the Gezi Park protests there has been a clear drift towards majoritarian rule as the definitive criterion of democracy. This means, "the nation must express its wishes through the Grand National Assembly. [...] This

29 Between 1923–1946 some political parties were established at the request of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (!); however they were short-lived and were either closed down or dissolved themselves. None of them participated in elections. As a result, the electorate's only option was the CHP.

30 The turnout in parliamentary elections in 2002 was 79%, in 2007 it was 84%, and in 2011 it reached 87%. Local elections show similar participation rates, <http://bit.ly/1LO9IR3> (8.3.2016).

31 The AKP's party programs between 2002 (the first AKP government founded by Abdullah Gül) and 2015 (the most recent AKP government founded by Ahmet Davutoğlu) show that references to pluralistic understandings are often declared to be relevant for gaining international recognition. This could imply instrumental tribute to otherwise less valued qualities, e.g. "Our target for a pluralistic, egalitarian and participatory democracy will upgrade Turkey among other world democracies" (AKP 2014: 23).

is the only way” (Erdoğan, quoted from *Evrensel* 2013); or: “The ballot box is the democracy” (Erdoğan, quoted from *Sabah* 2014). The AKP’s earlier approach regarding a liberal understanding of democracy based on enlarged participation rights and pluralism has been abandoned, whereas intolerance towards alternative voices has become more pronounced. In a provocative speech delivered during the early days of the Gezi Protest, the Prime Minister tried to discredit the protests and the protestors when he declared that “the nation gives us this trust and only the nation can take it back. [...] The ballot box is the only place to ensure it. Beside of the ballot box, no one can point at us as a target.” (Erdoğan, quoted from *T24*, 2013). Similar statements were made by the current Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu during the most recent election period (see *Star* 2015).

During our interviews with students and political experts, the majority of participants criticized this ‘thin’ understanding of democracy, pointed to deficits in Turkish democracy and stressed the importance of pluralism and/or the practice of participatory rights. One of the experts from the Human Rights Association, Hulusi Zeybel, confirmed that such new understandings of citizenship had emerged and were being practiced among the younger generation:

“Our generation was different. We were shaped with the old modernist ideology as the political individuals of that time promoted it. [...] Our understanding of democracy was from one angle [not open]. But when I look at the new generation, I see that they are different from us. The young people consider democracy as flexible, pluralistic, and including tolerance.” (Hulusi Zeybel, interviewed on 7 April 2015)

Similar observations showed up in several interviews with students. The statement of 18-year-old sociology student Hazal is a good example:

“The world is changing, growing and when we talk about the current situation in this world, I think of democracy as an issue in which each individual has a consciousness of governance and participation when asking questions like: Who is ruling us? We are voting but does it help us to be part of ruling? Who are we choosing? Are they in the parliament, the ones that we chose?” (Hazal, interviewed on 26 October 2014)

Another aspect was mentioned by Mert, a 28-year-old student of politics. He stated that the electoral understanding of democracy has always been a problem in Turkey and underlined the importance of a complementary public sphere:

“To me democracy is that every people in the country can participate directly or indirectly in the decision making process. However, if you ask others they would say it is parliament, elections. But I would say it is the public sphere, cafés, cinemas, theatres, and bookshops, generally the city. When these places do not exist anymore, the democracy cannot be consolidated.” (Mert, interviewed 28 October 2014)

Mert emphasizes the importance of how people interact with each other, find opportunities to share ideas – or enter deliberations, develop common perspectives and civil society alignments.<sup>32</sup> As a typical quality of urban life, this can also be seen as a mobilizing starting point of the Gezi Protest. It began as an urban public protest against the government’s city

32 Interview with Mert on 28 October 2014.

planning which, in the eyes of many locals, is an example of the ongoing gentrification that damages the city's public sphere, where historically many different population groups interacted with each other. This is related to one further important point that came up in several interviews, i.e., cultural experience of diversity as normalcy, and it is confronted by what political scientist Muhittin Bilge sees as one root problem. He stresses that Turkish society has never truly integrated democracy into its political culture because it was introduced by state-elites with top-down reforms at the end of the First World War. He discusses this as one of the important points in which Turkey still differs from many European democracies even today and a reason why the mainstream understanding of democracy in Turkey is limited to the electoral system (Bilge 2011: 53). This divergence between mere electoralism and pluralistic or participatory models of democracy runs through Turkey (Özbudun 2013: 59) and it entails different models of the relationship between the state and its citizens.

#### *The Turkish state and its citizens*

The state philosophy of modern Turkey was based on the perception that the state is something untouchable. This idea of the divine state is rooted in the understanding of the Ottoman Empire that was headed by a Sultan-Caliph (Aydın 2009: 26). The Kemalists followed the same path but changed the sources of power legitimation. Their republican ideology stressed the sovereignty of the state over its citizens (Karakaş 2013). In the Ottoman-Turkish political culture, the state elites considered themselves protectors and rulers of this "holy" state, i.e., they separated themselves from the citizens. The constitutional law professor Ergun Özbudun argues that this ideology is still echoed in several areas such as military leaders' speeches or actions, in juridical power, including the Constitutional Court of Turkey, and also in today's main opposition party CHP which was established by Mustafa Kemal (Özbudun 2013: 70, 83). The long-lasting single-party rule of the CHP between 1923 and 1946 and the dissolving of several parties with more pluralistic orientations toward ethnic, religious or ideological backgrounds substantiate his argument. This problematic legacy places passive citizens in opposition to the political elites, and the relationship to the state is normatively based on fear: The citizens are expected to surrender themselves to state authority, which is associated with a paternalistic image: the state is the protector, whereas the citizens are constructed as immature elements who have to respect and follow their *devlet baba* or "Father State" (Karakaş 2013).

Many, especially but not only young Turkish citizens have come to question this understanding. In qualitative research on state perceptions among Turkish citizens that was conducted by Suavi Aydın, it came to light that Turkish society falls into two groups in this regard: One group either rejects seeing the state in a superior role or does not want to regard the state as a sort of father. They believe that the political situation in Turkey can only improve if this way of thinking is abandoned. On the other hand, a second group retains a positive understanding of the state by continuing to see it as the good father (Aydın 2009: 26). This corresponds with a distinction between the (holy) state and the government: the government is traditionally perceived as something "mundane" and functional that operates in practice on the basis of clientelism (Aydın 2009: 8) but is not identified with the "holy" state. However, the AKP period of government has led to slightly



different meanings. The AKP government has been in power for over 13 years, which is the longest period for a Turkish government since the multi-party system was established. The AKP government faced challenges from the established guardians of the state and won the battle with these state representatives over sovereignty. In effect, it seems that the roles of state and of government have become conflated.

Another traditional mechanism in the Turkish state-citizen relationship is linked to the position of the army and its political and military power. Historically, the military had political influence on the parties and exercised its power in three military coups in 1960, 1972 and 1980. However, in the last 13 years, due to the efforts of the AKP and in line with EU requirements, the military's position has been redefined and subjected to greater civilian control. Nevertheless, due to the republican tradition, the military is still perceived by many Turkish citizens as the most important and trustworthy state organ.<sup>33</sup> The young people who were interviewed expressed an opposing view although, at high school level, traditional "national security lessons" were still obligatory until 2012, so that all of our interview partners had participated in these lessons. Their trust in the military or any other state body was surprisingly low. Zeynep, an 18-year-old sociology student expresses this very clearly:

"I do not trust any state body. Why would I trust anyway? Are the problems inside the military such as rape, violence, or harassment issues not apparent to the people? Am I the only one who sees them? How can people trust the military at all?" (Zeynep, interviewed 28 October 2014)

She makes respect of human rights a clear criterion for trustworthiness of state institutions and by doing so prioritizes the protection of the individual over the protection of the state. In this respect, the replacement of military tutelage by civilian tutelage in the AKP period does not mean a change for the better. 18-year-old sociology student Özgür describes this sobering impression: "The military does not affect us anymore in daily life; it happened of course during the coup. But the police is everywhere now, at each corner" (Özgür, 26 October 2014).

Such concerns were nourished when the AKP passed the new "internal security bill" in March 2015 after heated discussions among members of the parliament from both the opposition and the ruling party (BBC Turkish Edition 2015). The bill shows that the AKP is continuing to reconfigure the architecture of Turkish state institutions. The new law gives police forces almost limitless powers such as the right to prevent demonstrations and tighten penalties for people who participate in demonstrations (Human Rights Watch 2014). The historian Ferdan Ergut states that the AKP increased the power of police forces because oppression is the only tool to control those communities that cannot become part of the party's value system, such as religious minority groups or LGBT activists (Ergut 2014). In fact, the enormous police violence against the Gezi Park protest supports this

33 According to research conducted at Kadir Has University in 2013 and by the KONSENSUS Research Company in 2010, the military is still considered the most reliable state organ in Turkey; see: <http://bit.ly/1M49Oic> (8.3.2016), and for KONSENSUS: <http://bit.ly/1TH37Lk> (8.3.2016).

interpretation. While the then Prime Minister Erdoğan praised the police forces for having "made history" (NTV 2013), this "epic"<sup>34</sup> created even more alienation in the opposing sections of society. The police was described as "possible murderer, who is ready to kill, when the conditions are on his side,"<sup>35</sup> by one of our interviewees. Thus, rather than experiencing the police force as part of a protecting state, the relation with this state force has come to be shaped by the violent police actions in connection with the 2013 civic protest: "Father State" is not being experienced by the dissenters as a protector but as a bully.

#### *Valuation of fundamental rights*

Freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly have been the subjects of critical observation for a long time due to notorious deficits in this area in Turkey. In spite of the programs of the AKP in favor of ensuring fundamental rights and liberties referred to above, over time this field has also become a matter of political controversy. The correlation in principle between the further democratization process and the state of fundamental rights was stressed by Hulusi Zeybel from the Human Rights Association, who stated that a new constitution focused on human rights as they are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was necessary for Turkey. In order to overcome Turkey's deeply rooted problems, human rights would have to form the core of the new constitution.<sup>36</sup>

In the 2002, 2007 and 2011 Election Bulletins of the AKP, the promotion and adjustment of the same universal values were suggested. The bulletins or party platforms emphasized the acceptance of a new state understanding based on human rights as a means of improving the state of democracy (AKP 2002: 18; AKP 2007: 15 and AKP 2011: 32). As an important component, freedom of the press was also comprehensively stressed in the first two bulletins, for "the independence of the media is the requirement for a transparent and active civil society" (AKP 2007: 17). Contrary to these promises, however, Turkey has experienced dramatic setbacks regarding exactly those issues in the past years. Court cases have been opened against journalists who had voiced criticism, and even in some cases by Erdoğan himself. One of the human rights experts, Emek Eren from Amnesty International Turkey, summarizes: "Currently there are many court cases regarding the freedom of expression, and nowadays, 'insulting President Erdoğan' is the most commonly used reason against people."<sup>37</sup>

34 He used the Turkish phrase "*destanyazmak*" which has even more heroic meanings. For the sake of readability, it is translated as "make history" but the proper translation of "*destan*" would be an "epic".

35 Interview with Kağan on 25 October 2014.

36 Interview with Hulusi Zeybel on 7 April 2015.

37 Interview with Emek Eren on 13 April 2015.

Clear signs of a deterioration of fundamental rights in Turkey became obvious with the police action against the Gezi Park protest and subsequent events such as court cases against journalists and against physicians who had performed first aid on tear gas victims. Many journalists were imprisoned, and internet bans including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube were imposed. These three social network platforms were frequently used for communication and to provide information by the protestors when the official Turkish news channels did not report events. For this reason they attracted the attention of Erdoğan, who labeled social media “the worst menace to society” (Letsch 2013) and took steps to stop the people from using them: “We’ll eradicate Twitter. I don’t care what the international community says. Everyone will witness the power of the Turkish Republic” (Mauro 2014). The repression of freedom of expression and the press has in fact caught the attention of the international community. The European Commission 2014 Progress Report on Turkey states that “the bans on YouTube and Twitter were a matter of serious concern,” there is a need for reform of fundamental rights and to bring them “into line with EU standards” (European Commission 2014: 62). In 2014 Turkey ranked 154 among 180 countries in freedom of the media (Reporters without Borders 2014), and Freedom House rates the extent of press freedom in Turkey since 2013 as “not free,” whereas it had earlier already been rated as “partially free.” The 2015 Freedom of the Press Report on Turkey also found that the government has been using financial and other means of leverage in order to influence coverage or non-coverage of politically sensitive issues (Freedom House 2015). And early in 2016 the Turkish government made it to the international headlines with having police raid the offices of *Zaman*, the country’s biggest (conservative) daily newspaper, and placing it under state control.

Even if many people may easily circumvent the government’s prohibition of social media by changing the settings of their computers or mobile phones, or find critical news in the internet and thus find solutions for their daily communication habits, the growing control of the media is cause for concern that was voiced not only by many of our student interview partners, but by more experienced experts as well. Ümit Efe from the Human Rights Foundations of Turkey stated that although it had been always difficult to work in Turkey, it would be much more difficult these days:

“Due to the measures of the government, restrictions on the freedom of assembly and of expression are currently at the highest level, Turkey is not a democratic country. I mean, there is a violation of rights. Torture is still practiced by the state. Lately, it took the form of pepper spray cannons against people who use the right of freedom of thought and expression on the streets. The violence of the police became explicit. [...] If there is a danger to be shot dead while you are walking on the street, or if you are accused as a potential criminal because you are just a lawyer or human rights worker, how can you defend yourself?” (Ümit Efe, interviewed 7 April 2015)

Emek Eren from Amnesty International Turkey also observed changes in Turkish society in response to the growing oppression. And yet he sees a politicizing effect, because the obvious violation of fundamental rights has made more people become more involved in human rights issues so that awareness has grown when compared with the past:

“Authoritarianism increased and against this a reaction occurred. People started to be interested in the political situation [...] when we compare today with 5 years ago, then even the words “human rights” were perceived as scary, fearsome. I mean when you used to talk

about human rights in Turkey, people tended to think about [armed] conflicts in the Southeast of Turkey or something like that which leftist would use. But now it is not like this. [...] Now it [the notion of human rights] is something closer to people." (Emek Eren, interviewed 13 April 2015)

The distance between the ruling AKP party and those civil society actors who have experienced the politicizing process described by Emek Eren seems to be growing as a result of the ruling party's populist democracy concept and the diminishing value placed on fundamental civil rights. Here it is again important to note that this does not seem to bother supporters of the AKP, who have just re-elected the party by a very clear margin in November 2015. The question remains why so many people still support the party and vote for the AKP despite the existing and egregious violations of fundamental rights. According to İtir Akdoğan from HABITAT, the majority of Turks simply deals with concrete "daily survival problems such as providing food for the family" but do not pay attention to these more abstract topics. The following statement made by a worker in an open letter to the Turkish newspaper *Evrensel* exemplifies this rationale:

"I bought a house from TOKİ [Mass Housing Administration] in Aydinli, Tuzla with loans for 15 years. I still have loans for 13 years. [...] Our instalments are rising every year due to the inflation rate. After the elections in June [2015], because a government could not be formed, many workers – including me – were worried about the instability. [...] The TOKİ management told us frequently, 'If the stability is deteriorated and the AKP won't have the absolute majority, your installments will rise even more. The exchange rate increased, the interest rate increased... If you make something wrong, you would even lose your homes.' [...] I voted for the AKP in the November [2015] elections as a person who has loans to TOKİ for 15 years, not as a worker."<sup>38</sup>

In other words, while a civic opposition has emerged that embraces a pluralist democracy concept, for many Turkish voters civil rights do not occupy a place of such importance on the agenda that such rights determine who they vote for. Among large sections of Turkey's population the tradition of submitting to the alleged superiority of the state and to the will of those who represent the state as elected politicians is still alive. This means another challenge for the democratic consolidation process.

38 Evrensel, 2015: Bir iscinin mektubu: AKP'ye neden oy verdim? (A letter of a worker: Why did I vote for the AKP?), in: [www.evrensel.net/haber/265239/bir-iscinin-mektubu-akpye-neden-oy-verdim](http://www.evrensel.net/haber/265239/bir-iscinin-mektubu-akpye-neden-oy-verdim) (25.11.2015).

#### **4. Conclusion and outlook:**

##### **The chances for democratic consolidation in Turkey**

Divergent views within Turkish society are nothing new. However, the polarization that has increased over the past decade does not mean that established opposition forces have simply exchanged power positions. New conflict lines have emerged alongside – and in part as a reaction to – the AKP as a new political force and its leaders' attempts to reconfigure the public moral economy. The moral values of religious and rural society have become more legitimate resources in the public sphere under the AKP, while urban, educated and more secular sections of society have become distanced from state institutions, which are more and more identified with the ruling party. Not only have AKP government policies been dividing opinion from an early stage since it came to power in a diverse Turkish landscape of political identities, these policies have also led to a preoccupation with the possible conceptualization of democracy. Ironically enough, this stimulus is to be seen as one result of the party's initial reform acts, which on the one hand accelerated societal pluralization and raised awareness of fundamental rights and liberties that had been (and are still or are again) absent, and on the other hand simultaneously led to a drifting apart of the opposing political "camps" that have differing conceptions of democracy and the good Turkish citizen.

Although much of the detrimental backsliding into illiberalism in recent years may be attributed to the interests of the AKP and the profiles of the party's leading figures, central deficiencies in the country's political culture have played a role as well. Despite decades of electoral democracy and a strong tradition of constitutionalism, no political culture of valuing pluralism and the individual's fundamental rights has ever come into being, and the AKP shows no interest in fostering it either. On the contrary, the party has in the meantime become so used to representing the state that its leaders seemingly feel entitled to exclude political opponents from the collective imagination of the constituency. Nevertheless, the future development of Turkey is not necessarily heading towards ever greater deterioration of democratic rights and freedoms. The fundamental divergence in conceptualizing democracy – a populist regime based on electoral victories versus a system of checks and balances in which the political minority's rights are crucial – has become established in Turkish society and cannot easily be resolved. The Gezi Park demonstrations have shown that a critical mass for social movements exists that is demanding full use of participation rights. Attempts to crush these demands will produce new crises. As Biriz Berksoy points out in her study of the Turkish state security system, "without doubt, in the task of overcoming these problems of democratization and envisioning a democratic state of law, the greatest responsibility falls on the Turkish government" (Berksoy 2013: 10). External interventions cannot resolve the domestic power struggles, but reliable support of those actors who are working in favor of civil rights in Turkey is urgently needed.

The effect of EU conditionality has proven ambivalent in the case of Turkey, and for reasons lying on both sides. Conditions were accepted as long as they served AKP interests, but the political will to continue on this path slowed down after 2005, when accession negotiations started (Tocci 2014: 2). Turkey's ruling party showed more and more

unwillingness to give in to certain EU requirements by the time of the 2007 elections, because the AKP feared losing votes from the nationalist segments if it continued implementing reforms to broaden the freedom of expression and the cultural rights of religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey (Lagendijk 2013: 180–181). Hence, by today, only one chapter, namely that on “Science and Research,” has been closed to mutual satisfaction, and 34 chapters of the harmonization packages are still waiting to be tackled.<sup>39</sup> However, the slowdown was also caused by the EU’s “enlargement fatigue” after the round with 10 new member states in 2004 (Lagendijk 2013: 179). Moreover, the most recent developments in political relations show once again that the EU tends to act more on the basis of opportunistic situationalism than as a reliable negotiating partner: interest in Turkey grows whenever it suits EU interests of the day, such as for example in the need to find a strategy for coping with the European Union’s “refugee crisis.” Turkey’s membership process has become one of the longest and most contradictory in comparison with earlier processes and with those of other candidate countries. However, even if the process is not proceeding smoothly and Turkey’s candidacy is questioned again because of setbacks in the Turkish democratization process, steps have been taken that have had consequences, regardless of any future accession. The AKP rule has led to a number of leaps forward in Turkey’s democratization process – albeit possibly partially unintended – that continue to fuel domestic political rivalry.

The most impressive transformation has been reached in the field of civil-military relations in Turkey. The AKP government passed several new laws by 2009 to regulate the military’s position and contain the “deep state”.<sup>40</sup> The AKP succeeded in this regard, and the European Commission stated in all these cases that they were “good improvements” (European Commission 2011: 14; Independent Commission on Turkey 2014: 12). Nevertheless, they also served the AKP’s genuine interest in containing the influence of the old elites. Thus, the reforms in this field are a very telling example of the general ambivalence that underlies the AKP’s transformative activities: legal progress is made, but with the law being made and applied by the AKP alone the political system may forfeit democratic substance. The existence of a concerned political opposition that enjoys and exercises democratic checks and balances gains relevance in such a setting. International partners should keep an eye on this dimension of Turkey’s further democratization and not remain silent on problematic monopolizing and illiberal tendencies when engaging in consultations and bargains with the AKP government.

39 For more information, see the webpage of the Ministry for EU Affairs of Turkey: [www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=65&l=2](http://www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=65&l=2) (8.3.2016)

40 The “deep state” (*derindevlet* in Turkish) refers to an alleged clique inside the Turkish state which is assumed to have the power to control the country. The deep state members are supposed to be mainly from the army, the national intelligence service and the judiciary. Allegedly this force developed plans for overthrowing the AKP government (Freely 2007).

The influence of liberal democratic thought from the outside world and the experience of Europe in particular have been substantial in Turkey since the country opened itself up. One of our interviewees, a 28-year-old student of politics, described this effect pointedly when he explained that young Turks “have new sources – the internet, books, finally the world – at their disposal which influenced their political socializations. [...] It means that the world culture entered Turkey. They have met with the world. You can even discuss with them about Atatürk [...]. They do not experience themselves as without options as their mothers and fathers did.”<sup>41</sup> What he is describing here is a qualitative change of mindset that will not easily disappear again but will continue to influence political discussion of the implications of democracy in Turkey even in the currently tense atmosphere. Cemal Karakaş has described these young Turks as the “Erasmus generation” (Karakaş 2013) because of their cultural interaction made possible by a Europeanized education system. The (mainly young) people who called for participation rights and civil liberties during the Gezi Park protests have, as a result of globalized communication and cultural diplomacy, acquired an understanding of democracy that reaches beyond the electoral regime and majority decisions. Such a deeper understanding will have to be broadened if Turkey’s democracy is to be consolidated, for the Turkish democratization process will only move forward with a strong civil society. Experience from ongoing reforms proves that civil society organizations are committed across the country to furthering the Turkish democratization process, but that they are not necessarily involved in the flows of consultative, legal and financial support organized by the international donor community (see Mannitz/Reckhaus 2015). Spaces for political deliberation and social dialogue can be modeled especially by international agencies, and information offered to raise the level of knowledge of how individual rights can be fought for, e.g., with the help of European Court decisions. External development assistance can and should also do more to support the democratic consolidation process in Turkey by promoting the necessity of participatory forms of citizenship and the core value of the rights of opposition and the media.

41 Mert, interviewed on 28 October 2014.

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